



RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

The time-travelling Doctor and his trusty companion Donna arrive in 2008 at the National Press Club of Australia to encounter a shapeshifting alien addressing a throng of slackjawed journalists. 'Reporting on performance *will* be a requirement of any new school funding agreement,' the figure intones with a nasal twang. Cue spooky music as the prime ministerial figure peels off his latex mask to reveal himself as – gasp – the previous prime ministerial figure. It's the pre-credit sequence to an episode of *Doctor Who* and it's eerily spooky.

Titled 'Coalition evolution,' the story involves the Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the 'biggest school reform agenda in history,' an colonisation of education policy by alien beings who throw Australia into a spiralling time loop of endless policy proposals for a national curriculum, testing and school league tables. 'Within a year, we want to see increased information available to Australian parents and, within three years, a report that shows not just how their child is doing, but how their child's school is performing compared to similar schools. Knowing where there is

underperformance will help us to target additional resources,' the prime ministerial figure intones.

'School principals will be given the autonomy to make more staffing and salary decisions,' the figure says. 'I know some will resist these changes,' he adds with a sinister laugh, but he has devised a cunning plan using both a carrot and stick. He will, he says, work together with the states and territories. A gratuitous scene showing the prime ministerial figure beating state and territory education ministers over the head with a huge carrot is not shown, being beyond the budget of the *Doctor Who* props department.

Caught flat-footed, the Doctor returns in the Tardis to 2004, where the previous Coalition prime ministerial figure explains that 'The payment of...Commonwealth money will be conditional on government schools and independent schools and Catholic schools meeting certain requirements,' while his ministerial henchman observes that 'It's time that as parents we received much more information, meaningful information about the performance of schools.'

Returning to 2008, the Doctor discovers a small resistance cell calling itself the bit of COAG that doesn't have the Commonwealth in it. 'There's a feeling that a lot of things Julia Gillard is talking about are exactly the same things Julie Bishop was talking about,' says a silhouetted cell member. 'The thinking is that it's the same person who's really doing the talking here.'

Not so, says the current Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, when confronted by the Doctor on a sort of metal gangplank over some kind of bubbling furnace of lava, left over from a previous episode. 'The agenda we are dealing with is my agenda. It has been generated by me,' she intones, peeling off her latex mask to the sound of the *Doctor Who* end-credit music.

Of course, this is a two-parter and if you want to find out whether the 'biggest school reform agenda in history' succeeds, you'll have to wait for the next episode, but inevitably, you'll forget and be out having pizza when it's screened.

This month's Grapevine is by Steve Holden, the Editor of Teacher.

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